
MY EXPERIENCE CHANGED MY LIFE

My story began when I was kid, maybe 10 years old. I had a lot of dreams really want to achieve, but they were still dreams until I grow up and see the life as real. Sometimes I feel that I dream in something over my age and sometimes I think it's impossible to achieve. The dreams were always growing up and up until I had chance to achieve one of my dreams.

Hey, My name is (Maad Mahfoudh), Oh I mean (Maad Sharaf) which that was the first difference I faced here, because in my country (Yemen) we call the people by their first name following by their father's name, but that wasn't only difference. Actually I found a lot more of differences.

America, America was one of my biggest dreams, but actually I didn't know what our dream look like, I thought America is a huge building, exciting places, drunken people everywhere and war with every country, and that was what we see it every day in TVs and American movies, but never showed us the nice things or the very respectful people.

I and other 32 students from my country had a full scholarship from the State Department of the United States, we were more than happy and so excited to live another life and have a different experience. I remember that day when we left our country, I remember when the tears were falling from our parents' eyes with a big hugs at the last moment in the airport, from that day every one of us had a big responsibility in his/her shoulder has to achieve. And that responsibility was making a bridge between the United States and Yemen.

I arrived in Wisconsin on Aug 9th and wore a winter scarf in the first month because I was so darn cold here, while everyone here was hot and laugh when they see me wearing the winter clothes which I brought it from Yemen.

The second month was Ramadan, Ramadan is a special month in Islam, and so I didn't eat or drink anything from 4; 30 am to 7pm, although school and volleyball started. I tried to do all my stuff alone; it was a very big challenge for me and the first Ramadan outside my country and without my family. I found my host family consider me a part of the their family, they tried their best to help me with my things, and even with the food they tried so hard to keep me away from the pork or anything against my religion (Islam).

By: Maad Sharaf from Yemen

I came here and had no idea what the people think about my country and my religion, I found a lot of people who had a bad views about our culture. At that moment I felt I'm the only one who's responsible for teaching the American people who we are as real and we are not that bad as they see in the news or newspaper. I think the people helped me to feel that I have to do something may help building that bridge of understanding.

Actually, I always believe that if I act by who I am, I will be a good ambassador for my country, especially when I'm the only one who's Arabian Muslim in my community, so I felt that I'm not only representing Yemen, but the middle east and all the Islamic countries in the world.

Everything was new and different for me, sometimes I feel the difference between the two cultures is very huge, but I started thinking to make a huge bridge as big as the amount of the differences to make the life easier. I started to join clubs, sports and activities which helped me to meet a lot of friends from different countries in the world.

I've seen a lot of things for the first time: tattoos, dreadlocks, women in shorts, Water Park, pets, dishwashers, garages, lockers in school, postal service, political debate, video of 9/11 attacks, mittens, boots, furnaces, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Halloween, thanksgiving, Christmas, snow, and more. And I learned to do many things I've never done it before such as, biking, skiing, and playing Volleyball and a lot more.

My host family has a very big part of my life, I think I'm so lucky when I got them, they let me have a great experience and they really opened my mind for everything, my host mom, she has a big deep heart, I learned from her that nothing is impossible in this life, but the important part is that you have to make sure that you want it and always give your best for everything, my host dad was always giving me advices like his kid, I feel so happy when I talk with him, he's such a wonderful dad for 4 kids, my 3 younger host brothers are awesome, they are the music in the house, I always remember my 3 younger brothers in my country when I'm playing with them or doing any activities, this family gave me the opportunity to see more than 14 states while I'm here, they were always helping me with my decisions and let me feel that I'm really an important part of their life and tried so hard to about my happiness and don't let me feel that I'm alone.



By: Maad Sharaf from Yemen

And I really don't know how my life will look like without them.

I always feel so happy when people ask me questions about Yemen or Islam, sometimes they ask me a silly questions which I never thought about it, but I never considered that a silly questions because I really know what they are thinking about. Sometimes I feel that the people love listening to my perspective about the world events, American culture and anything happening in the US.

Sometimes the people ask me if I miss my home and my family, and I think everyone in the world live out of his home country feel homesick especially in the first month, but when I think about that for moment I remember how we worked so hard until we got here, how our families in Yemen encouraged us and gave us their trust to be a good responsible for our country and religion, so then immediately I see myself forgot everything, and try to work harder to reach my goals.

I learned from my experience here so far how I can be a good person for my life, how to correct my mistakes, how to choose my decisions, how to be responsible for myself, and be cheerful, patient, flexible, happy every time, and smile even if I'm sad.

I opened my mind for everything, for life, religions and cultures and still practicing my religion and have my culture values. I'm a part of the Youth Group in my host family church and I found that so interesting to learn about what the people believe in other religion and help them to learn about Islam and see other perspectives.

International education week was my best opportunity to do a lot of my presentations show the people our life style and what's Yemen look like. I was so happy doing that 5 times a week in different places, such as high schools, kid's schools, churches, and more. I felt so proud of myself when I was answering every single question from them. I worked so hard on that and I'm still doing it everywhere, my host family and my friends helped me a lot for preparing everything even a trip to the Islamic center in my city for the high school kids and some teachers, they learned a lot from helping me too as well as I learned how to be more confident front all different of people. I was always praying to give Yemen at least a small thing while I'm here and be a really good ambassador for it, I couldn't believe myself at that moment when they told me that I won the first place from 100s of people applied in IEW and I'm now a different person which believe nothing impossible if you worked so hard .



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CHANING THE WORLD, that's what I'm dreaming about, right now.

My final advice is always believed that you can make a difference in the world, but be sure that is to be who you are wherever you were.